



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

Second Sunday of Advent A



El Greco, John the Baptist, 1600-1605.



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2. **Blessing of an Advent Wreath**

Before your group lights the first candle of the Advent wreath, the following blessing may be prayed.

Leader: The kingdom of God is at hand.

All respond: Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Leader: Let us call to mind God's mercy and salvation as we wait in hope during the days and weeks of Advent. As we gather around this wreath let us remember God's promise to be with us until the end of time.

Scripture is read. Isaiah 9: 1-2a.

All respond: Thanks be to God.

After a time of silence, all join in prayers of intercessions and in the Lord's Prayer.

Leader: Let us ask God to bless our wreath and to bless us.

After a short silence, the leader prays:

Heavenly Father,

We praise and thank you for the great gift of your Son Jesus, the Christ.

You sent him as a Light to the nations.

You sent him to reveal your Light and Love to a world darkened by sin.

Christ is our hope and our salvation.

Upon him we place all our trust.

He is Emmanuel, the promised Messiah.

He brings wisdom and peace to a troubled world.

Lord God,

bless this wreath and

bless those who gaze upon its light in hopeful anticipation.

Come, Lord Jesus, come in haste, come!

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

The second candle is lighted.

Leader: Let us praise God, the ruler of the universe.

All respond, making the sign of the cross:

The God who made heaven and earth!

The blessing concludes with a verse from "O Come O Come, Emmanuel"

Liturgical Context

- ▶ Advent is a time not just of expectant waiting but of profound renewal.
- ▶ The cosmos joins the cries of human longing for the Christ—the One who came once in history, who comes each week in our hearts and who will come again at the end of time.
- ▶ There is a reminder of the judgment that awaits us all throughout the entire season.
- ▶ The symbolism of the Advent wreath reminds us of the tension between light and darkness. We are reminded of the darkness the earth once knew as it waited for the coming of the Light of the World—the Christ. A candle is lit each week illustrating the gradual increase of the Light that dispels the darkness.
- ▶ The Advent wreath cradles our primary symbols--wood and light. “The wood refers to the ‘living greens’ that are used to make the wreath...The wood or pine embodies the primary symbol of the cross. It is the wood of the cross which will become the sign of our salvation at Easter whereby all are saved by the ‘wood of the cross’. The four candles represent Christ, the Light of the World!”¹ Four purple candles, or three purple candles and one rose candle [for Gaudete Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent], or four white candles may be used in the wreath.
- ▶ Mary slowly emerges as a primary character in the unfolding drama of the season.
- ▶ Today particularly John the Baptist takes center stage as a primary player in the ethos of the season. One can almost hear his ancient cry, “Repent and change your lives!”
- ▶ We are reminded that the new liturgical year (Year A) that began on the First Sunday of Advent echoes the voice of St. Matthew. Matthew’s audience was primarily a middle-class, Jewish Christian audience. He uses scriptural images, stories and themes familiar to a Jewish community to relate the Christ event.
- ▶ We are reminded of the importance of the liturgical year. We are reminded that the entire mystery of Christ is made manifest to us in the liturgical year and that the primary truths of Christian faith are manifested throughout the seasons.
- ▶ Advent prepares us to encounter the truth, reality and dogma of the Incarnation that we will experience at Christmas.
- ▶ We remember three comings of Christ—the Christ who came once in history, the Christ who comes each day in our hearts and the Christ who will come at the end of time.
- ▶ Salvation history is remembered and made present to us in our Advent liturgies.
- ▶ The season invites prayerful diligence as we remember what God has accomplished through his Son Jesus throughout human history, what he is doing now and what he will continue to do in our lives as we go about the business of building his kingdom on earth as we wait in joyful hope for the kingdom yet to come.

¹Linda Gaupin, *Catechesis and Liturgy, Course Text. 52.*

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

Reading 1: Isaiah 11: 1-10

- ▶ Isaiah, prophesying in response to the refusal of the Israelite kings to submit to God's authority and rule over them, images a future ideal king whose origin can be traced to David's lineage.
- ▶ Isaiah's prophesy comes from a section of Isaiah referred to as the Book of Emmanuel (7:1-12:6).
- ▶ This future king will be greatly gifted by God to establish God's reign on earth.
- ▶ This future king would restore Israel's political place in the world.
- ▶ This future king would possess wisdom, intelligence, power, fear and awe of God's sovereignty and would usher in a new age, a new world unlike the present age.
- ▶ Isaiah refers to this future king's dynasty as a *stump*—that which is left after the demise of a mighty flowering tree. The tree is a common scriptural reference to royal dynasty.
- ▶ Isaiah strengthened, encouraged and gave the people hope.
- ▶ They were to have no fear!
- ▶ God would raise new life—a new shoot—from the mere *stump* of David's father, Jesse.
- ▶ Isaiah seems to be recalling the image of perfect paradise—a return to Eden—a return to the place where all creation lived in peaceful accord with all creation.
- ▶ Isaiah encouraged the people to look toward a better day—a day in which peace, not war and unity, not division universally reigned.
- ▶ Evil would not have the last word in Isaiah's future prototype kingdom.
- ▶ If this prototype kingdom is the future kingdom of God ushered in by the Messiah, how then do we respond to those today who say Christ could not be that future king/Messiah since war and discord still abound? Lions still devour the small lamb and violence is pandemic.
- ▶ Jesus is that just shoot of Jesse. He is the promised Messiah.
- ▶ However, the kingdom envisioned by Isaiah is in the realm of now and not yet. We live in the kingdom that **is** as we await the kingdom **yet to come**—the realization and fullness of Isaiah's vision.
- ▶ Kingdom living is a process of growing toward the future vision—of becoming who we are called to become.
- ▶ However, the kingdom of God envisioned by the prophet does exist in theory and in reality when two or more are gathered in Christ's name. When Christians gather and live according to the Gospel of love, there is no war, discord, division, or violence. Such is the kingdom of God in our midst—it is an icon of the future city of God.

- ▶ Unfortunately even in our Christian communities we do not always experience Isaiah's prototype kingdom. We are sinners and we do not always make the most Gospel-centered, appropriate choices and in that case we are obstacles to the implementation of the kingdom Christ came to establish.
- ▶ When we live and establish the reign of God here and now we are given a glimpse of that future eternal city in which we all hope to share.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ How can this reading be a word for you today?
- ▶ In what way have you experienced the kingdom of God Christ came to establish in your own Christian community? What are some obvious obstacles to the promotion of that kingdom?
- ▶ In what way is your community called to live more fully the kingdom Christ came to establish?
- ▶ How are we as Christians falling short of Isaiah's vision?
- ▶ How are you falling short in your everyday life? Name the ways that you are promoting the reign of God at your place of work, your home and in your recreation. Name the ways that you fall short.
- ▶ Isaiah looks to the future kingdom in which God's mighty work was borne of humble origins. Indeed the mission of Christ was born of such humble beginnings. Are you able to point to anything in your own life that began in a small way, humble origins, and grew into something wonderful? Are you able to see the hand of God in that experience? What does your experience teach you about God?

Second Reading: Romans 15: 4-9

- ▶ Paul presents his catechism on love in the Christian community.
- ▶ As far as Paul is concerned, the kingdom of God is alive and well and is carried out in the Christian community.
- ▶ Discernment and the extension of God's love among the members of Christ's Body is the antidote to discord and disunity in the community.
- ▶ Paul insists that there is a new way of living and being in the Christian community. The way he sets forth is rooted in love, peace and unity among the members.
- ▶ Factions comprised of the weakest and strongest members existed in the Roman community.

- ▶ Paul agreed with the strong members who asserted that kingdom living does not require strict observance of Jewish law.
- ▶ As far as they were concerned they saw no purpose in observing ritual practices and strict codes of behavior from their former lives.
- ▶ Their Christian life and good Gospel living was all that was needed to establish the kingdom of God in their midst.
- ▶ The weaker members, on the other hand, felt compelled to keep their feet firmly planted in two different paradigms, and were unwilling to cast off their former way of life.
- ▶ Paul understood their need and allowed them to maintain their former ritual practices.
- ▶ Paul insists that being faithful to Jesus Christ crucified is all that matters for the Christian.
- ▶ Christians are to extend to one another the same self-sacrificing love that Christ extended to us by his sacrifice on the cross.
- ▶ Paul's exhortation is a word of hope—a word that permeates throughout the Advent scriptures.
- ▶ Paul challenged believers to search the Scriptures for the necessary strength, courage and wisdom to avoid conflict with brothers and sisters in the community.
- ▶ When Paul speaks of the Scriptures he is referring to Old Testament corpus as the New Testament had yet to be written.
- ▶ The Old Testament foretold the future Messiah as we hear in the proclamation of the Old Testament readings for Advent.
- ▶ Paul's first century communities were privileged to experience the fulfillment of those prophecies firsthand. Some people were still alive who had encountered the historical Christ.
- ▶ Paul's catechism on community, unity, peace and harmony is a universal word that spans the generations.
- ▶ We are to work toward unity whenever discord threatens to destroy that unity.
- ▶ Again, the cross of Christ and the offer of self-sacrificing love is the antidote to discord.
- ▶ A common theme for Paul was Christian hope. He insisted that where hope exists, when God responds to hope, when he acts and responds to our prayers and requests, even more hope is generated.
- ▶ When God responded to our need for a Messiah, God acted and sent his Son. The people's generations of prayerful, expectant hope for a Messiah resulted in God's action. God sent his Son Jesus who continues to generate more hope by his continued action in the lives of believers throughout all the ages. Hope begets hope.
- ▶ The hope of Advent squarely reminds us of our future hope of Christ's return and our participation in the Great Eschaton—the End of Days and eternal life with Christ who sits at the right hand of his Father and we who sit at his feet to worship and adore the Godhead throughout all eternity.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story or reflection from his or her life.

- ▶ Where is the good news in this reading?
- ▶ When you consider Paul’s catechism on Christian unity and the Christian community how is your particular community living according to those principles?
- ▶ Have you ever offered self-sacrificing love to another person? How did it make you feel?
- ▶ What are some ways you might offer that love in your own communities of faith, home, work and play?
- ▶ What does Paul teach us about animosities, discord and disunity in the community? What can we do as Christians to prevent those detriments to true community?
- ▶ How would you live your life differently if you were as attentive as the ancient communities were attentive to having one foot firmly planted here on earth and the other foot walking toward the future Day of the Lord—our future heavenly kingdom?

Gospel: Matthew 3, 1-12

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ Slowly the Church prepares for the Incarnation.
- ▶ John the Baptist assists us in this holy endeavor. He reminds us of the implications of the Incarnation—Jesus’ life and salvific mission.
- ▶ The Incarnation as a theological concept in the Church means so much more than the historical fact of Christ’s birth. The Incarnation is the inauguration and embodiment of God’s eternal plan of salvation in Christ. The Incarnation encompasses the entire mystery of Christ’s life, death and resurrection—the entire Christ event.
- ▶ Jesus’ (and by extension Matthew’s) primary message was the inauguration of the kingdom of God.
- ▶ Jesus preached the kingdom throughout his entire mission. He preached it in allegory, in story, in parable and in teaching.

- ▶ The metaphor—*kingdom of God*—was a foundational theme in the Old Testament.
- ▶ The term was a symbolic reference to God's covenant relationship with the people of Israel.
- ▶ Deep within the national consciousness of the people was the myth of the royal kingdom—a kingdom that was borne out of the people's experience of monarchy before the Babylonian exile.
- ▶ The underlying basis of the myth insisted that the all powerful God created the universe. He entered into relationship with all creation, especially the people of Israel. God was their God and they were God's people. This God was a warrior God who delivered the people out of bondage in Egypt, defeated all their enemies and gave them the Promised Land and then reigned in complete sovereignty. The image of the warrior God was a powerful national myth in ancient Israel.
- ▶ *Enter the Babylonian Captivity.* The Babylonians invaded Israel and carried the people back into captivity. The people's defining myth was shattered and their national identity needed to be recreated.
- ▶ The metaphor *Kingdom of God* replaced the former image and became a symbolic reference for the people to strengthen them in times of doubt, despair, turmoil and persecution.
- ▶ Apocalyptic fervor was at a fever pitch in the years before Christ. The *Kingdom of God* metaphor was understood as the final great restoration of God's true kingdom which would ultimately overturn the present evil age.
- ▶ God would restore the peace and harmony intended at the creation of the world.
- ▶ The more evil the situation at hand, the more the people could be assured that the *Kingdom of God* was about to be inaugurated.
- ▶ The reference to *Kingdom of God* at the time of Jesus incited the corporate memory of the people. The term reached back to a former time and to images of the sovereign, warrior God who delivered the people from bondage, established them on their land and inaugurated the royal kingdom. It is easy to see how hope sprang eternal for the realization of their ancient myth.
- ▶ Along comes John the Baptist. He proclaims that the *Kingdom of God* is at hand.
- ▶ Every good Jew in the crowd knew what that meant. The promised final kingdom was inaugurated.
- ▶ Imagine their thrill. They stood as participants on salvation history's defining stage. What they had hoped for was unfolding before them and they were on-the scene participants.
- ▶ Their future hope had been realized.
- ▶ John the Baptist takes center stage in the Advent drama before us.
- ▶ His biography is resplendent with provocative images. He comes from the desert—a place of God's epiphany and a place of testing—the place that had to be crossed before reaching the final destination of Promised Land.
- ▶ The images and symbolic references are also pregnant with meaning.

- ▶ John was promising a new *promised land*. Would the Jews whose corporate memory was so entrenched in the former *Promised Land* be able to boldly sojourn into the new one at hand? Were they courageous enough to leave the past and march boldly into the future eschatological kingdom? It was up to them.
- ▶ John called for a complete transformation of heart, mind and soul (metanoia)—not only of the individual but of the community as well.
- ▶ John preached a gospel of baptism and repentance.
- ▶ Some in that early first century community thought that John was the long awaited Messiah.
- ▶ Early Christians regarded John the Baptist as the precursor to Jesus as a result of his message of repentance and the respect that Jesus had for him.
- ▶ Matthew held John in the highest regard, even going so far as to compare him to Elijah.
- ▶ However, there is to be no dispute: John was not the Messiah and **Jesus was the Messiah**.
- ▶ John cleared the path for Jesus' arrival—he prepared hearts for the mission of healing, reconciliation and restoration Jesus was inaugurating.
- ▶ John called the people as a body to repentance—he called for the reformation of Israel itself.
- ▶ John's appearance gave credence and authority to his mission. He spoke like the prophets. His clothing was evocative of the great tradition of Old Testament prophets. His diet of honey and locusts came from the desert.
- ▶ All these images symbolically compared John to the great prophets of old who spoke against oppression, injustice and whose mission it was to renew not just individuals, but the entire community—society as a whole.
- ▶ John confronted the elite structures that oppressed the poor and marginalized of the dominant culture. He accused them of being born of snakes—an insult of the highest order in first century shame-based culture.
- ▶ John challenged the prevalent notion that status and honor were directly tied to a person's privileged birth. John insisted that such status and honor should be based on the way a person lives his or her life—not on an accident of birth.
- ▶ John challenged the Pharisees and Sadducees to see with new eyes. They, in turn, chose blindness.
- ▶ John similarly challenged the high priests for the way in which they levied severe temple taxes, seized properties and caused food shortages.
- ▶ The hierarchy in Jerusalem placed heavy burdens on the simple priests and peasants of outlying areas. John as a former priest himself knew well the burden placed on him by those in higher authority.
- ▶ John, like all prophets, was a profound advocate for the poor.
- ▶ His message is as pertinent today as it was then. When one considers our contemporary society and the way in which the poor and marginalized continue to be oppressed and in these economic times have their options dwindle before them, John's clarion call is a word of consolation for those who feel hopeless today.

- ▶ There are few like Mother Theresa championing the cause of the poorest of the poor. Those who do, often have their voices silenced. Very often the poor and marginalized (illegal immigrants, for example) are portrayed as villains and disdain for them becomes a badge of national honor.
- ▶ John is an icon for the lowliest of the low in our world. Very often decent, church going people join the throngs and consider their indignation of those who are illegal, who are on welfare, whose houses have been foreclosed, who are homeless, to be righteous indignation before God, when in fact, it is God who shows us his face in their suffering.
- ▶ John is clear—those who refuse to repent will be judged by God. He calls for no less than conversion of heart evidenced by right action.
- ▶ We will either stand with John and the prophets who went before and after him or we will face severe judgment—we will be cast off.
- ▶ We so easily minimize such severe proclamations in our contemporary world and naively insist they do not apply to us. We are too sophisticated; we are too enlightened; we are too busy to do what John demands. We tell ourselves that we are good people—that God loves us—and that we are not to worry. All will be well.
- ▶ However, the Johns of this world are here to tell us that all will not be well! When we do not stand with the poor and marginalized; when we are silent in the face of oppression, we are part of the problem—we are not on the side of peace, and just resolution.
- ▶ Advent is a time-out in which we take stock. Do we participate in building the kingdom of God or are we obstacles to it?
- ▶ Will we let the words of John enter our consciousness and allow them to transform our lives? “We must not speak of God’s love coming down at Christmas without remembering that the divine love is fierce in its judgment of those who resist love’s demands. John the Baptist warns us that repentance must not be procrastinated”. ²
- ▶ The time is now! Will we change our hearts—or not?



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ What does the image of Kingdom of God mean to you? Since we no longer have kings or queens that rule our world, how is this an image that can be meaningful

²Douglas R.A. Hare, *MI*, 20.

to us?

- ▶ Imagine that you are standing before God at judgment time. When God considers your life—your behaviors, your attitudes—when God considers how you regard the poor and lowly in our world, how would he judge you? What positive, affirming things might God say to you? In what way, if any might God challenge or judge you in your attitudes and dealings with the poorest of the poor?
- ▶ In what way does John challenge us to be a better disciple? How can you concretely respond to this Gospel by your behavior, your actions and your attitudes?
- ▶ The people of Israel's image of God was that of warrior God who delivered them out of slavery, set them on the Promised Land and ruled the nations in sovereignty. What is your image of God? Where did it come from? Upon what experiences in your life is it drawn or based?
- ▶ They say that some things never change. In what way are the poor in our world oppressed and taken advantage of like the poor of John and Jesus' day?
- ▶ Why is the Incarnation important to your life? (perhaps refer to appendix #3)
- ▶ What do you think about our belief that Jesus will come again to take us all home to be with God? How do you think that will take place? Do you think we will see that day? How should we live as a result of what we believe?
- ▶ In what way, if any, am I living as though Jesus' return was imminent? What could I do to more completely live as though Jesus' return is imminent?
- ▶ Do you fear the judgment of the last day? Imagine standing before God. Considering your life to this point, what will God affirm in you? What might he suggest you could have done better?
- ▶ What steps might you take this Advent season to become more aware and participate in the life of Christ who lives within, the Christ who is to come anew at Christmas and the Christ who is to come at the end of the world? What are the implications of this Gospel? What is the challenge?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.
I trust in you: strengthen my trust.
I love you: let me love you more and more.
I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.
I worship you as my first beginning.
I long for you as my last end.
I praise you as my constant helper.
And I call you as my loving protector.
I want to do what you ask of me:
In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.
Let me love you Lord as my God.
And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.
A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.

OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

#1. One way I am promoting the reign of God is by my witness to the Gospel. My passion for Scripture and teaching has given me a rare opportunity to be a positive agent of restoration of the kingdom. However, any time I judge another person, or do not respond to the Gospel the way I called to respond, I am an obstacle to that restoration. I was recently touched by a Sunday liturgy in my parish. The pastor invited everyone who is ill to come forward for prayer by the community. The image was powerful. An entire community extending hands over a hundred people with varying healing needs is truly an image of the kingdom Isaiah was speaking about—a people extending love and signs of unity to God's people. The pastor particularly asked for prayers for me since I am preparing for a kidney transplant. A woman came to me after Mass and offered to be a donor—she offered a part of herself—she offered me her kidney! I was extremely touched by her offer of love and compassion. She offered a part of herself in Christ's name—if that is not kingdom living at its finest—I do not know what is!

#2. When I ask myself how we are called to respond to John's message in our contemporary world I reminded myself that we have no further to look than the health care debate. I believe that health care today is an issue that cuts to the heart of John's message in the Gospel and in his overall preaching.

I don't care one fig for the politics that surround this issue--shame on the politicians, politics and political posturing. What I do care about is people—especially powerless people with no access.

I am privileged because I have good insurance. My sister has severe COPD. She is on oxygen twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. Technicians come to her house and provide her with life-giving air once a week. They come because she has insurance. Why is she privileged to live and breathe when others without insurance are forced to die more quickly because they do not have similar access? John would have sounded the clarion call on their behalf.

My son is mentally ill. There are few options for him. He has no insurance and even if he did he would have been denied it by this time due to so many hospitalizations. Our society does not want to pay for the facilities to care for such people because it is just one more social program people do not want to pay for. They are our world's forgotten sufferers; they are the silent sufferers. They have no voice. I even tried to get our Catholic lobbying group to take up a simple cause for the mentally ill at the state level and even they rejected it. Such mentally ill folks are society's cast offs. We cite too much social and governmental spending as a reason not to help such people. John would have sounded the clarion call on their behalf.

I am privileged to have insurance. I am in the process of applying for a kidney transplant. The first consideration for acceptance in the program is the quality of the person's insurance. I will hopefully be given a chance for a new life. Yet there are others who have no insurance and who will not be so blessed or privileged. Why are they less valued

than I? John would have sounded the clarion call on their behalf.

I know these issues are not as simple as they appear. However, I wonder if the parties on both sides of the political divide were more concerned about the people of God and less concerned about their own political futures what better outcomes could have been achieved?

John challenges us to remember that God is watching us and watching how we respond to those in need. I pray that my life will be enough of a testament to stand with the righteous at final judgment. I know that more transformation is needed.

#3. An optional Advent reflection from a previous year: This Advent if I do nothing more than consciously become aware of my participation in the life of Christ who dwells within—I have done much to prepare a stable for the renewal of Incarnation that also resides within each of us and gives us our divine dignity and origin. The following reflection that I found on a recent trip to Ireland had a huge impact in bringing that awareness into my life in a more focused way. It is a wonderful Advent/Christmas reflection.

In one of my stops to an ancient Celtic monastery I came across a small travel guide with a spiritual twist. I was profoundly touched by the wisdom of Incarnation expressed by two monks in this little travel guide. An Irish author of intriguing travel guides of Ireland in his book, “The Secret Places of the Burren” tells of an encounter with two men he met during his travels across Ireland. One was a brilliant nuclear physicist and the other a distinguished doctor. Both were in their early thirties, unmarried and both joined contemplative orders. They shared what motivated their decision to join the contemplative order. John Feehan describes how this encounter not only gave him an appreciation of their decision to make such an abrupt life change, but also a glimpse into the meaning of life itself. His description of what they shared touches the very core of life itself and the meaning of our Christian existence.

Feehan describes the basic philosophy from which these men gave up their lucrative lives to spend them in contemplation of God: He said: “The human being exists solely for the purpose of becoming an earthly life form of God... The inner dimension of man should rule his life, and that inner dimension was God. Everything else was a mere side show. One lived a life in practical terms in as close a union as possible with God. One did not do it for a reward. One did it because this is the only rational explanation of life itself, the only explanation that gives meaning to death. The average person on the outside would be inclined to feel that if you take away money, sex, power and success from life you are left with nothing and there is little point in staying alive. The monk sees it differently. All these things are to him transient. As soon as you achieve one you want more and more and each achievement becomes emptier and shallower and brings on more and more stress and tension. The highly successful man in material terms may well be the unhappiest...

The best things in life are those which come from within: creativity, tolerance, living in the present, meditation, contemplation and above all a loving care for all life, not just human beings, but every living thing. A life lived in those terms brought unbelievable happiness”, said the monks. They made an analogy, “A stained glass window looked at from the outside is merely a grayish glaze. But looked at from the inside is a thing of indescribable beauty. If you are on the inside you can experience everything to its fullest. If we accept the ‘inner’ life it does not really matter whether or not we are in a monastery---fulfillment of life’s purpose will be ours.

Both men are now dead. One gave up world-wide fame, the other great wealth. Neither would concede that they gave up anything. They would contend that they gave up trash for everything. Indeed both were two of the happiest men I ever knew.
(p. 106, 107)

Advent is an invitation to look at the beauty of the stained glass prisms of our soul—of my soul and the souls of all human beings—and see the face of God.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Kingdom of God
Incarnation
Sin and Grace
Advent Overview
Liturgical Year

Eschatology or the End Times: Heaven,
Hell and Purgatory
Catholic Social Teaching
Faith

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

KINGDOM OF GOD

Isaiah envisions a return to the paradise of Eden. Jesus is the Messiah Isaiah foretold. It is Christ who came to restore the harmony of Eden. Advent is a time we imagine that kingdom in which the lion will lay with the lamb and the peace and harmony of the Garden will be restored. Jesus re-established that kingdom and promised that we are living in its reality. When two or more are gathered in his name that kingdom is established. Advent is an appropriate opportunity to focus our doctrinal session on what the Church teaches about the establishment of the KINGDOM OF GOD.

INCARNATION

Advent prepares for the Incarnation of Christ. Tradition considers the Incarnation to include the entire mystery of Christ—much like the Paschal Mystery. The season of Advent /Christmas heralds, exalts and proclaims the Incarnation. Without it, there would be no death and resurrection, and thus no salvation. The Incarnation is the primary integral event in human history. Advent is an appropriate time to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about the INCARNATION.

SIN AND GRACE

John the Baptist preached a gospel of repentance and conversion. John the Baptist was concerned about the spiritual welfare of God's people. He called the people of Israel to repent as he heralded the Messiah whose sandals he was not fit to tie. The call to repentance of this season is an invitation to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about SIN AND GRACE.

ADVENT OVERVIEW

Advent is a season that prepares for Christmas. Advent is considered in tandem with Christmas. The season does not stand alone. Today we will focus our attention on what we celebrate in this very important season that prepares for the Incarnation of Christ. Thus, our doctrinal session today will focus on the OVERVIEW OF ADVENT.

LITURGICAL YEAR

We have just begun to celebrate a new liturgical cycle. The entire mystery of Christ unfolds throughout the coming year. It is most appropriate that during the season of Advent we focus our attention on what the Church celebrates in the LITURGICAL YEAR.

ESCHATOLOGY or END TIMES and HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

The Scriptures of Advent are alive with cosmic images of last days and end times. Advent is an appropriate time to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about last things. Thus, today our doctrinal session will address ESCHATOLOGY or END TIMES and HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The prophets of Advent look to the Day of the Lord in which peace and justice will be established. Advent is a time we consider our responsibility to promote peace and justice in the world. Catholic social teaching addresses our Christian responsibility to promote peace and justice. It is thus an appropriate time for us to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

FAITH

The prophets of Advent, John the Baptist premier among them, sound the clarion call for conversion and deep abiding faith. It is time to take stock, to pay attention to God's invitation to grow in or relationship with him. It is thus an appropriate time for us to reflect on what the Church teaches about faith itself. Today's doctrinal session will focus on FAITH.